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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9918  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001733

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM  
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: AFGHAN GOVERNMENT'S RESTRAINED INTERVENTION IN  
KURRAM AGENCY CONFLICT

REF: A. A) 08 KABUL 3096  
[B. B\) 08 ISLAMABAD 3337](#)  
[C. C\) 08 PESHAWAR 474](#)

Classified By: PRT and Sub-National Governance Director Valerie C. Fowler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is a joint Embassy Kabul/Embassy Islamabad cable.

[1. \(C\)](#) Summary. Officials of Paktya province in Afghanistan and tribal elders brokered an agreement on June 15 in an attempt to quiet two years of fighting between the Shia Turi and Sunnis in Pakistan's Kurram Agency. The residents of Bushera, a Sunni enclave on the Pakistani side of the border surrounded by Turi-controlled lands, appealed to tribal allies and Paktya officials. The latter are sympathetic to the humanitarian plight of Bushera but also wary, since Upper Kurram's Shia leaders are seen to have played a significant role in checking cross-border militant movements and keeping Paktya's border with Pakistan relatively quiet. The dispute is multi-dimensional -- sectarian, access to resources, and landlord-tenant tensions -- exacerbated by Pakistani militants as well as possible Iranian meddling. A senior Peshawar official praised the work of the Paktya-brokered jirga for helping quiet a dispute that was threatening to become a major disruption to the finely balanced equilibrium of Upper Kurram. While this latest agreement appears to hold some promise for alleviating a flashpoint that could have broader security repercussions along the border, two years of broken truces against a much longer backdrop of local quarreling makes it likely that this is not the last that we have heard of the Bushera dispute. End Summary.

Addressing Bushera Humanitarian Needs  
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[2. \(C\)](#) Paktya province Deputy Governor Mangal and tribal elders from Dand Patan and Chamkani districts hammered out a framework agreement between Turi Shia and Bushera Sunni from Upper Kurram Agency June 15 at a coalition base in Chamkani, about eight miles from the border. Mangal and the elders and several other Paktya provincial officials, including the Tribal Affairs Director, Tribal Advisor to the Governor, and Reconciliation Director, met first with a group of about 15 Turi elders, then with a similar number of Bushera elders, and finally presented their proposed agreement to a combined jirga. That agreement addressed what the residents of Bushera have been saying for months are their major concerns: access to food and medicine from Paktya, access to the province for their sick, and access to travel routes to Kabul for their workers going abroad. The agreement presumed restrictions on these permissions that would address Turi concerns of insurgents moving through their areas.

[3. \(C\)](#) The people of Bushera live in a collection of villages in Upper Kurram surrounded by Turi lands. Since the most recent reigniting of a centuries-old conflict two years ago,

the Turi have completely blocked the road leading to Paktya, where many in the multi-tribal villages have kinship ties and need access to markets. During the past several months, the residents of Bushera have been active in using allies in Afghanistan to pressure the Turi to allow them that access. The Turi claim that Bushera harbor Taliban, making the road blockage a matter of survival. A joint meeting in Chamkani two weeks before the June 15 jirga produced only continued stalemate.

#### Paktya's Balancing Act

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¶4. (C) The Paktya Deputy Governor discussed his game plan for the day before the elders arrived. He said the most important imperative for Afghanistan would be to ensure that the Turi continued to keep insurgents out of Paktya province. He compared the Paktya border with Turi areas to the border between Sunni areas in Lower Kurram and Khost province, which he said insurgents move across at will. He stressed that despite the fact that he was Sunni and from the Mangal tribe (along with the Bangash, one of the most prevalent tribes in the Bushera villages), his primary consideration was the security of Afghanistan. He said he had been to the area 3-4 weeks earlier to recruit local elders and Dand Patan District Administrator Niaz Mohammad for a jirga that would work on the Turi-Bushera problem, but acknowledged it had not been effective.

¶5. (C) Mangal confirmed a claim by the Bushera from the meeting two weeks earlier that the Afghan Border Ministry had issued an order to close the Paktya border to the Turi while

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Bushera demands remained unmet. Mangal explained that although the order was genuine, Kabul did not understand the situation on the Paktya-Kurram border and that Paktya authorities had "found a way not to implement it." He said that each side had allies on this side of the border, implying that the Bushera had persuaded sufficiently influential allies to pull levers of the Afghan government to their benefit. (Note: Paktya Senator Mohammad Layiq and other Paktya MPs have made efforts in Kabul and in the region on behalf of the Bushera recently, as well as arranged a meeting for them with Ambassador Wood in November 2008 ) Ref ¶A. End Note)

#### Turi Grievances

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¶6. (C) During their initial shura on June 15, the Turi elders, whose main spokesman was Haji Aman Ali from Bruki, made clear they were aware of the threat of a border closure with Paktya. They said such a move would strangle them, given that their access to the rest of Pakistan is blocked by Sunnis at Sadda, but said if it were God's will for them to all die, then they would. The Turi also recounted the key elements of their long-standing conflict with the Sunni, saying it had never been about Sunni vs. Shia, but rather invariably involved land or resources and that fighting would flare for a couple days followed by reasoned discussions. But the last two years, they said, were different. They insisted the current fighting should more accurately be considered Shia vs. Taliban, and that they respected their Sunni brothers as always. But they accused the Bushera, along with the other Sunnis of Kurram, of allowing "Uzbeks and North Waziris" into their areas (Refs B and C).

¶7. (C) Following one interlude where they retreated outside to confer, the Turi returned with a proposal that the Turi and Bushera raise a joint force to drive the Taliban from Kurram. The Turi told us later that they had no hope the Bushera would accept this proposal and urged us to put pressure on the Bushera -- possibly through their Afghan allies -- to accept.

¶8. (C) Deputy Governor Mangal was detailed in his appeal of brotherhood to the Turi. When Afghans needed help, the Turi had allowed them to come to Pakistan; now when the Turi needed help, Afghans would be there for them. But he was also careful to say that the problems in Kurram Agency were not problems the Afghan government could or should solve. To reinforce Afghan solidarity with the Turi, he noted that insurgents do not come to Afghanistan through Turi areas; when they do cross from Kurram to Paktya, they must go through Mangal areas directly bordering Jaji district in the uppermost part of the Agency. He said many Sunnis in Kurram believed Afghans did nothing for them because of their friendly relations and over-reliance on the Turi. For this reason, he had to be able to say to the Bushera that the Turi were willing to respond to their legitimate needs.

#### And Bushera Denials

¶9. (C) With the Bushera, Mangal was firm. He recounted twice a report he had recently received of insurgent threats to pharmacists in Chamkani not to sell medicines to the Turi. Both times, implicitly accusing the Bushera or those they aid of being behind the threats, he said such actions must not be tolerated. The Bushera protested that the Taliban were their enemies too and accused the Turi of facilitating Taliban movement to their villages from Lower Kurram; how else could the Taliban get there, they reasoned, without coming over roads the Turi control? The Taliban, one Bushera elder said, "come to our villages, kill, and go."

¶10. (C) The Bushera, led by Bak Jamal, described their dire situation and reiterated their conclusion that they would have no choice but to move their villages, either to Afghanistan or elsewhere. (Note: Influential Paktyans alerted us a month earlier to the Bushera ultimatum involving the relocation of their villages, urging efforts be made to ease their plight lest the Bushera carry through with the threat. Such a move, of course, would be contingent on the approval of the Turi, and past migration patterns out of Bushera indicate that residents would not likely move to Afghanistan. Pakistan's former Additional Political Agent for Parachinar and several Turi contacts of Consulate Peshawar have consistently described the Sunni population of Bushera as a shadow of its former self; the Bangash who once predominated there have largely migrated over time to Sunni-dominated areas of Lower Kurram.)

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¶11. (C) Deputy Governor Mangal was clear that if he and the Afghan elders were to help resolve the situation, they could not favor their fellow Sunni -- and that the Turi were in any case their brothers too. The Governor's Tribal Advisor told the Bushera that Afghans could help mediate their problems, and help them get the supplies they need, but it would be up to them to fully resolve their issues. He and several of the Afghans appealed to the Bushera to work more intensively with Pakistani officials. Bak Jamal described one recent effort in Islamabad that had resulted in the Turi opening the road for one day only, hardly an adequate resolution.

#### Just a First Step

¶12. (C) The agreement signed June 15 by all the elders on both sides was short on details. Deputy Governor Mangal indicated to us that it was a framework and that the Turi and Bushera could fill it in with the terms that had governed access to Paktya through Turi lands before fighting had restarted two years ago. Food and medicine deliveries, for example, could only come from Paktya via pickup trucks, not jingle trucks, and would be driven by drivers both sides trusted. Individuals from Bushera intending to travel to Afghanistan, who to date have moved through Turi territory under a system in which they have gone to a specified

location near Bushera and there received Turi escorts to the Afghan border, would now need clearance by the Paktya government and NDS as well. Mangal seemed confident that terms such as these would be clarified at subsequent meetings now that the main principles had been agreed upon, and he urged both sides' elders to continue discussions in good faith. He offered the Turi and Bushera regular consultations with the Dand Patan District Administrator and Paktya elders should that prove useful as talks move forward.

#### The Pakistani View

¶13. (C) FATA Secretariat Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Habibullah Khan told Peshawar Principal Officer June 17 that the dispute around the Bushera enclave had become a real threat to the equilibrium of the area. The ACS was aware of and praised the Paktya-brokered agreement. The trouble, he said was not purely sectarian. Landlord-tenant classes falling largely along Shia-Sunni lines added land disputes to the mix of grievances between the two communities. Bushera's Sunni area, the ACS explained, controlled an important access point for water distribution while surrounding Shia domination of the roads meant control of food, other supplies, and petrol. "Everyone," the ACS said, "has been trying to blackmail each other." Qom-based madrassas which run "charities" in Kurram have provided Iran with reach into the area and allowed for interference by the "Medhi militia." (Note: Following the first significant recent outbreak of violence in spring 2007, Baitullah Mehsud directed resources to the Kurram-Orakzai area to fuel sectarian violence.)

#### Comment

¶14. (C) The presence of both the Turi and various Sunni groups and tribes from Kurram on the Afghan side of the border is for commercial and kinship reasons. Insurgent or Taliban movement across the border, at least in Paktya, is minimized due to the Turi. In the estimation of the Paktya government and coalition forces in the area, the Turi are the main reason that Paktya's Pakistan border is relatively secure. Both hope to preserve valuable relations with the Turi, who control almost the entire border of the Province with Kurram from the Pakistan side. Whether the Turi will have the confidence to implement their agreement with the Bushera and how significantly this framework will add to current arrangements for transit by Bushera residents to Afghanistan remain to be seen, but the restrained intervention by Paktya leaders at least offers hope of easing what appears to be a precarious situation for both they and the Bushera residents in Kurram. A more comprehensive solution, such as the Turi proposal to raise a joint force, will likely be more elusive.

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